

## What the Heck is High Fructose Corn Syrup?

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Have you ever looked at the ingredient list on the back of that soda can and wondered what the heck high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) was? If so, you're not alone.

Since the 1970's it's been very easy to look at ingredient lists and see HFCS close to the top of the list. According to the American Dietetic Association's position paper, "*The Use of Nutritive and Nonnutritive Sweeteners*", HFCS is a nutritive sweetener (contains calories) that has replaced sucrose (table sugar) in many foods and beverages. Food manufacturing companies would rather use HFCS because of its sweetening power, lower cost, and functional properties that enhance flavor, color, and product stability. You can find HFCS in such products as carbonated beverages and other sweetened drinks, baked goods, canned fruits, jams, jellies, candies, and dairy products. I bet you're wondering right now, "so what?" Here's the "so what."

It is generally agreed that excessive consumption of refined sugar such as HFCS is undesirable. The USDA and the Food Guide Pyramid suggest that a maximum intake range from 6% to 10% of energy (or 6 to 18 teaspoons) from added sugars should be consumed daily. The reason for this is refined sugars consist primarily of "empty calories," and when more nutritious foods are replaced with sugar, your intake of vitamins and minerals and other beneficial nutrients decrease. In addition, refined sugars are energy-dense (i.e., they provide a large number of calories in a small volume) and contain no fiber. According to Dr. Alan Gaby's review article, "*Adverse Effects of Dietary Fructose*", HFCS may be responsible for increasing the prevalence of chronic diarrhea or other functional bowel disturbances, type 2 diabetes mellitus, obesity, some liver disease and raising your blood triglyceride levels. If you think that you may be at risk for any of these complications, or you would just like to decrease your sugar and calorie intake, you have options.

At present time, five nonnutritive (contain no calories) sweeteners are approved for use in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration. These sweeteners are saccharin (Sweet 'N Low), aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal), acesulfame potassium (Sweet One), sucralose (Splenda), and most recently neotame (not yet available). Nonnutritive sweeteners, like other food ingredients, appear on the food label in the ingredient declaration and can become a normal part of your shopping list with little extra effort. Unlike HFCS, these sweeteners can offer consumers a way to enjoy the taste of sweetness with little or no sugar or caloric intake. Nonnutritive sweeteners may assist in weight management, control of blood glucose, and prevention of dental caries, if replacing HFCS or other sweetening products.

Now that you have the facts, you can make an informed decision about food choices that affect you. If you need further information on this subject or any other general or specific nutrition guidelines, the American Dietetic Association's website, <http://www.eatright.org/>, is a good resource.